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The Miller-Unruh Reading Act of 1965 was passed to promote the prevention and early correction of reading difficulties and the achievement of high quality education in California. The law provides for the employment of teachers specifically trained to teach reading, for monetary incentive to encourage such training, and for the establishment and maintenance of school libraries. All districts receiving equalization aid may participate in the program to provide for specialist teachers who are classroom teachers given special instruction in the teaching of reading. These specialist teachers work with first-grade children to prevent reading difficulties and do remedial work with small groups of second and third graders. Districts that receive aid are allowed to plan their own reading programs with the stipulation that they meet the basic requirements of the California State Board of Education. In the program's first year, 1966-67, 53 districts employed 252 specialist teachers, absorbed 238 scholarships, and participated in 193 courses and workshops. In the second year, 224 districts applied with requests for 950 specialist teachers. This figure is expected to triple in the 1968-69 year. (BS)

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THE STATE'S ROLE IN IMPROVING READING INSTRUCTION
A STATE PATTERN IN CALIFORNIA

SESSION 8B - THURSDAY, APRIL 25, 1968
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Background

In California the State's responsibility for education has traditionally been that of requiring and providing for a minimum program that may be increased by local effort. The California Education Code has made certain curricular requirements which include the teaching of reading, grades 1-8. To assure that these requirements are met, funds have been provided on a basis that assures statewide equalization for the foundation program. Basic textbooks and also a limited number of supplementary texts have been supplied. District and county boards of education have had the responsibility of preparing courses of study for schools within their jurisdiction. They may always increase requirements and resources beyond the minimum of the State.

During the past two decades, as the population of the State has expanded at a tremendous rate, problems of providing education for the fast growing

school enrollment have increased at an equally dizzy pace. Wide diversity among student population, mobility of families, varied educational backgrounds of classroom teachers and administrators new to the State have all added to the difficulties of organizing, articulating and financing an adequate program of education. In the crowded classrooms children with special needs could receive little help. It became evident that some of these special groups, such as the gifted as well as the mentally retarded and physically handicapped, were not being served within the general framework of the State's educational system. In most cases lack of district funds to go beyond the bare minimum of State requirements or lack of trained personnel made it impossible to meet the educational needs of these children.

As urgent demands for help came from educators and from the public, the State Legislature became interested in financing special programs. Child Care Centers or Children's Centers had been state financed since the close of World War II. Now special programs were established for the mentally retarded the physically handicapped and the gifted. A state financed pilot program for compensatory education in California pre-dated Federal aid for educationally deprived.

Recognition of Reading Problem

In the late 50's and early 60's California legislators were becoming increasingly aware of two concerns in education: the importance of effective reading instruction for all children and the importance of the quality of a child's early school experience. They felt impelled by pressures from many sources to take some action that would give all children in the primary grades an opportunity for school success. Consequently, Senator George Miller

and Assembly Speaker Jesse Unruh sponsored a bill that eventually was signed into law as the Miller-Unruh Reading Act of 1965.

Description of the Miller-Unruh Reading Act

The purposes and aims of the Act are prevention and early correction of reading difficulties, and achievement of high quality education in the public schools of the State. All districts receiving equalization aid may, if they wish, apply to participate in the program offered by the Act. This voluntary feature puts responsibility on the district. To carry out the purposes of the Act, the law provides means for: employing teachers trained in the teaching of reading, providing incentive to encourage such training, and stimulating the establishment and maintenance of school libraries.

Specifically, funds are provided for special teachers of reading on the basis of one specialist for every 125 children in average daily attendance in grades one, two and three in a school or a district that wishes to participate in the Program. More specialists are allowed if the district results of a statewide reading test given each May, show that there is an educational need. The specialists salary is funded by the State up to the amount of the average salary of California elem. teachers during the previous year. Two hundred and fifty dollars is added as a bonus for the teacher.

Funds are also provided for scholarships of two hundred and fifty dollars each. Any first, second or third grade teacher in the State may apply for these. Finally, funds of five hundred dollars per specialist teacher are allowed toward the salaries of full-time qualified librarians working in schools or districts where specialists are hired.

The Specialist Teacher's Role

The specialist teacher is the key to the program. To qualify as a specialist teacher of reading, a certificate is required. This certificate may be granted to a teacher who (1) holds a regular California teaching credential, (2) is nominated by the school district on the basis of a demonstrated proficiency in the teaching of primary grade reading, and (3) passes a state examination that tests knowledge of modern approaches in the teaching of reading and differences in styles of children's learning. Self-nomination is possible, but in this case, a special observation panel must witness evidence of the teacher's ability to instruct in the classroom.

From the time the program has been in operation a point has been made of the title, specialist teacher of reading, rather than a reading specialist. This person is regarded as an exceptionally fine classroom teacher with a somewhat broader knowledge of the subject of reading instruction than the average teacher. He is not, however, regarded as a reading specialist in the sense that Dr. Gray was a reading specialist.

Responsibilities of the specialist teacher are defined by the California Education Code and by the California Administrative Code. In general, the specialists are to work with all children of grade one in groups of varying sizes to prevent reading difficulties. They are to work with small groups of children in grades two and three to correct difficulties. They must analyze test results and assist classroom teachers in various ways through individual and group conferences and meetings.

Because the specialist teachers are the most important elements in the program, districts need to select them thoughtfully. A strong teacher who

represents the best type of reading instructor in the schools will be in a position to build and strengthen the entire primary reading program. New teachers coming in will receive the kind of help needed at a crucial time. Teachers already in the district have an opportunity to turn to a competent person for help in determining the needs of pupils, for help in selecting new materials and for help in keeping aware of new developments in the field of reading.

Program Requirements

The district that elects to participate in the Miller-Unruh Program, besides nominating specialist teachers, must make application through the office of the county superintendent of schools to the State Department of Education. The application requires a general description of the program that the school intends to provide through the specialist teachers. Wide flexibility is allowed by the law and this encourages each district to plan in terms of its own particular needs. Specifically stated is the fact that no application can be rejected on the basis of the methodology of providing basic reading instruction which the school district selects.

Certain limits are, however, defined by requirements for course content and criteria for approval that were established by the State Board of Education. The required minimum course content includes: (1) attention to the basic skills of word recognition including phonics and to comprehension skills, (2) systematic and continuous practice of skills and independent reading, (3) presentation of a wide variety of literature, (4) continuous assessing of language skills and abilities of pupils, (5) instruction and practice in oral language, (6) utilization of sensory experiences to provide

a store of basic concepts. Criteria for determining approval of the district applications to participate in the program include requirements for keeping individual pupil records, for the evaluation of pupil progress, for coordination of instruction of the specialist teacher with regular classroom instruction and for a plan for communicating with parents. In brief, a program that considers all aspects of reading and relates closely to the regular school program is required.

Implementation of the Act

A State Department coordinating committee involving four bureaus of the department have had responsibility for implementing the Act. In developing policies and procedures, emphasis has been continuously upon (1) prevention and early correction, (2) provision for individual learning abilities, (3) the development of the role of the specialist as supplementing the total program, (4) local responsibility, and (5) the importance of cooperative planning.

Local and regional group meetings and conferences have been held for the purposes of explaining the Act, for bringing specialist teachers together to develop a sense of direction and purpose, and for providing inservice education in the new approaches to reading instruction.

The Miller-Unruh Program got off to a slow start for several reasons. Final legislative action did not take place until a short time before the fall opening of school. The process needed for certificating teachers was too complicated for haste and the original formula for provision of state funds required more district matching than many districts were financially able to assume. Legislative changes, before the second year of operation

established the average salary base for funding which is currently used.

First Year of Operation: Problems and Results

However, during the first year of operation in 1966-67, 53 districts employed 252 specialist teachers and conducted approved programs in the state. Two hundred and thirty-eight scholarship grants were made and a total of 193 courses and workshops were offered in 33 colleges and universities as approved for fulfillment of scholarship requirements.

A major problem in this first year of operation was lack of working space for the specialist. Schools were resourceful in revamping closets, trailers, multi-purpose rooms and all sorts of odd corners. Some schools were fortunate in having acquired reading centers under other programs. In some schools specialists worked in classrooms with the regular teacher.

Another problem was the coordination of the special instruction with the regular classroom instruction. Some districts have been especially inventive and creative in developing and coordinating the program. Larger districts have identified teams of specialists and developed long-range inservice plans, using college personnel for professional assistants and providing opportunities for extension of librarian services. The greatest success has been in those districts, both large and small, in which the administration provided all possible opportunities for district personnel concerned to have adequate time for planning and evaluating progress. Continuous and sustained interest of the administration brings the best results.

Evaluation has proved a difficult problem; one year's experience is a scant time for sufficient proof as to the value of the program. The 53

Participating districts have reported test data required by law. The data is based upon the Stanford Achievement Test which is required by the Act and will continue to be accumulated. Unfortunately, the required tests given to children of the first, second and third grades in May of each spring term have done little to build "esprit de corps" in primary teachers. The tests have, however, succeeded in raising some vital questions and directing attention to the need for appropriate means for assessing the abilities and achievement of young children. The original bill excluded mentally retarded children and educationally handicapped from being tested. Now, attention has been drawn to the fact that many non-English-speaking or nearly non-English-speaking children are incapable of dealing with the standardized tests. Better ways of assessing and dealing with the problem of these children are under study.

The findings resulting from the data of the tests at the end of the first year of operation of the Miller-Unruh Program, though inconclusive, show cause for optimism. The research staff of the State Department has warned that only continuing observation over a longer period of time can give reliable data.

Informal evaluations of a more subjective nature were also made by all districts. Returns from these reported positive gains in attitudes of pupils as shown by increasing interest in reading of books, in attitudes of parents from their expressions of appreciation of help given to their children and in an increasing awareness of all teachers to reading problems. Significant progress, as shown by individual children's records supplemented by informal tests, tape recordings and other such measures was also reported by a

majority of districts.

Present Status and Future Outlook

At present, in the second year of operation of the Miller-Unruh Program, 224 districts have applied for participation with requests for 950 specialist teachers of reading.

A preliminary survey of estimated participation for the 1968-69 year shows the possibility of a tripling of the districts now in the program. As the program expands, the progress of the original 53 districts will be followed closely. A variety of inservice activities are projected by the State Department of Education in cooperation with county and district staff. Informational bulletins concerning new methods and materials are to be developed. Reports on effective programs will be prepared and, hopefully, more effective means of evaluation can be developed.

The Miller-Unruh Program is a long way from finding all the answers, but it offers an opportunity for the whole school to mobilize its resources in understanding individual reading problems of children and in helping to find successful answers.

The Miller-Unruh Act in many ways can serve as a catylist for broader action. It touches education at many points:

- The primary child and through him his parents in the districts that participate in the program
- The classroom teacher who decides to become a specialist and also the primary classroom teachers in the district
- The nurse, pyschologist or other resource personnel whose services are available

- The administrator who must take the responsibility for seeing that specialist teachers are nominated and for seeing that programs are initiated with district board approval
- The county superintendent of schools who must approve applications for all districts and administer programs for schools under 50 in average daily attendance
- The college that offers courses for specialists and other teachers interested in adding to their knowledge of reading instruction
- The librarian and the candidate for library training.

In this state supported program, an opportunity is offered to schools in which considerable freedom is allowed for discovering and putting into effect unique and personalized ways of working with young children. It is to be hoped that the results will bring success to many, even beyond those now in school.